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## The Birth of New Ethnoses? Examples from Northern Europe

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**Abstract:** One of the new phenomena in the contemporary world is the ongoing emancipation of ethnic groups. This is taking place at various levels both local (regional) and national. The paper presents some examples of such phenomena taken from the area of the Uralic languages of northern Europe. Two come from Lapland: the Kvens and the Finns speaking the Meankieli ethnolect. Two are from the Russian Federation: the Izhma Komi (Isvatas') and the Pomors. The last two come from Estonia: the Setu and the speakers of the south Estonian Voro language. The Pomors, who are generally regarded to be a Slavic group, have been included because of their acknowledging their mixed Slavic-Uralic origin. The ethnogenesis and contemporary situations of each group are in each case very complex and different. These differences are chiefly due to the political and social situations differing in each Scandinavian country and in Estonia, all of them being different from the same in the Russian Federation.

**Keywords:** Kvens, Meankieli, Komi-Izhma, Isvatas', Pomoryans, Setu, Voro, ethnic emancipation, ethnogenesis

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For years ethnologists and culture scholars have been beating alarm for the frightening speed with which languages, cultures, and peoples are dying out with no chance of rebirth. The best-know of such reports listing the names of dying or already extinct ethnic groups concentrate on the non-European areas, those which are rather marginal from the European point of view. On closer examination we shall that the same problem concerns our own continent. Although it is generally known that the dying out of cultures, languages, or peoples is a natural process – it has taken place in both medieval and early modern Europe, not to mention the antiquity – we seem to forget that the same process is an ongoing one also today. the spectacular cases of Celtic languages (like Manx or Cornish) and the West Finnish ones (Livian, Votic, Izhoric)<sup>1</sup> show that the process is taking place upon our very eyes. Those languages, and many others, went out of use or will soon do because of the pressure from their demographically and politically stronger neighbors. We shall have to consider them dead with the disappearance of their last native speakers, even though the examples quoted above do show some partly successful rebirth attempts. Most frequently, though not in every case, the death of a language is followed by the death of its ethnos for which the language in question was the basic vehicle of culture.

The second half of the XX century, and even more so the early years of the XXI century, have brought a wholly new phenomenon, the reverse of the above. The wave of new social processes connected with the emancipation of minority and local communities developed into movements aspiring to recognize different groups as the minority (ethnic, national,

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<sup>1</sup> These are only examples. Over the past several dozen years many more languages died out (or are in the process of dying out). This concerns all language groups, which is disastrous for the speeding up of the disappearance of cultures that have been expressed in those languages.

language) ones. This phenomenon concerns almost all European countries. It is, of course, involved with the current politics, and conditioned by the present-day legal status. Even a general study of this phenomenon in Europe<sup>2</sup> would take much more space than this paper allows. Therefore, I would like to concentrate on a few selected examples of the Uralic peoples (or ethnoses)<sup>3</sup> of today's Northern Europe.

Two examples are taken from Scandinavia: the Kvens and the Meänkieli (Meänkieli): two from North Russia, the Izhma Komi and the Pomors, and two are Estonian: the Setu and the Voro (Võro) language (see Plate 1). These, of course do not exhaust the list of North-East European ethnoses that are in the process of being born. We have deliberately excluded the the Saamis<sup>4</sup>, for their problem concerns the extinction rather than the birth of new ethnoses, even though the example of the Saamis of the Kola Peninsula shows that also in this group we can come across the examples of a true rebirth<sup>4</sup>. We have also left out Finland, where the "dominating" that examples Pan-Finnism obstructs or even prevents the emancipation of the Karelians.<sup>5</sup> The examples of Norwegian Kvens or Swedish Tornedalians (the Meänkieli)<sup>6</sup> shows how the emancipation of a minority takes place in a contemporary democracy<sup>7</sup>. The examples from Russia show the various paths of ethnic emancipation in the Russian Federation that are usually strongly connected with current politics. The Setu and the Voro language examples<sup>8</sup>, are quoted to prove that the emergence of new ethnoses of ethnolects is not limited to large and well-established state organisms, but may also turn up in smaller or younger communities<sup>9</sup>.

## The Kvens

This group has appeared only recently in official sources and statistics (Piasecki 2011), but the group of this name is already mentioned in several medieval Nordic sagas<sup>10</sup> and is located in the area of present-day Botnia. The legendary kings of Kvenland were

<sup>2</sup> One of the Polish examples here could be the question of the Silesian nation (or ethnos) and the "godka" or Silesian ethnolect.

<sup>3</sup> The rank of each of them, that means establishing whether we are dealing with an ethnographic, regional, language groups and with sub ethnos, ethnos, or a nation, is not only a point of controversy among scholars, but most of all, a political problem (compare: Shabaev, Dronova, Sharapov 2010).

<sup>4</sup> This also proves that the ethnic (national) censuses, if not conducted properly, reflect the current political situation much more than the national one (for example, the number of the Saamis of Kola Peninsula given in official sources has increased 10 times over the past 50 years!).

<sup>5</sup> Their being ethnically and linguistically different from the *Suomenlaiset* – that is, the speakers of Finnish or "Suomi" – is not questioned anywhere outside Finland.

<sup>6</sup> There is no good Polish name for this group at present. The topical literature uses the name "Meänkieli", but it is the name of the ethnolect, not an ethnonym so it rather should not be used. The Polish language norms require writing the language names without capitals, and the names of peoples (nations), with a capital letter. Tornedal – that means the Tornio River valley (Torniojoki in Finnish, Tornealven in Swedish) is itself a Swedish name, so it's not correct when referring to the Finnish population.

<sup>7</sup> "Contemporary" has to be stressed in view of the very recent discrimination procedures of the Scandinavian administrations against the Saamis (calling them "Saami minority" would be prejudicial as it was Sapmi, the Saami motherland, that was taken over by invading states).

<sup>8</sup> The Setu, as explained later on, live on both sides of the Estonian-Russian border and therefore are not a "purely" Estonian example.

<sup>9</sup> The Russian Federation, Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Estonia are not all the states on whose territories the Uralic peoples live. For the sake of completeness one should also consider the Szekler, a Hungarian subethnos living in Romania. However, as we have limited the area of our considerations to Northern Europe, and both the historical conditioning and the present-day situation of the Hungarian diaspora are very different from the circumstances of Northern Europe. We leave the Szekler to the Balkanists.

<sup>10</sup> Particularly those connected with the legendary Biarmia (Leont'ev, Leont'eva 2007). The famous Egil Saga (published in Polish in 1974) mentions Farawid, one of the kings of Kvenland.

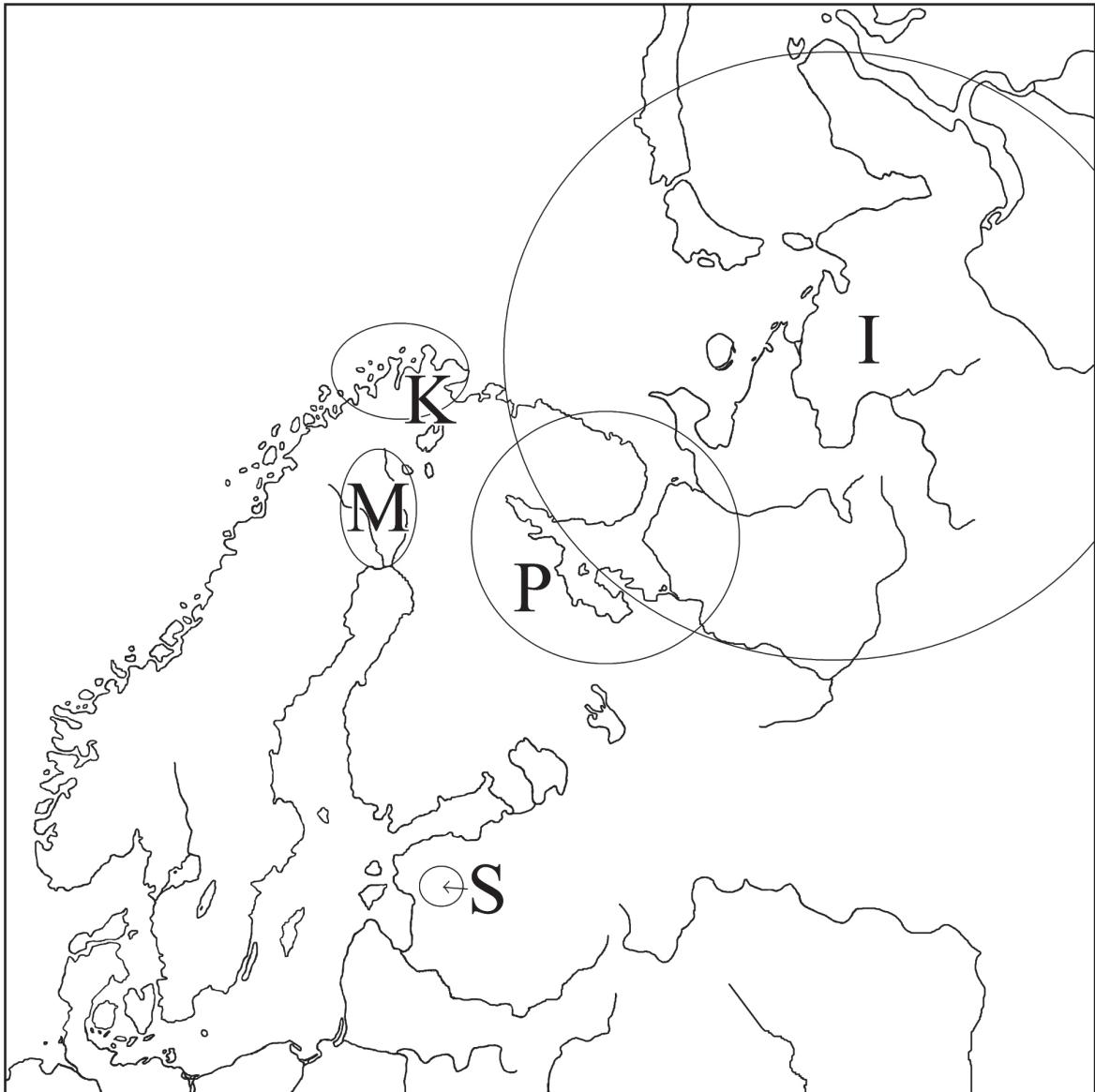


Plate I: General location of the groups discussed in the text (orig.). Abbreviations: S – Setu and Voro, M – Meankieli, K – Kvens, P – Pomortsi, I – Izhma Komi

supposed to become the future kings of the Orkneys.<sup>11</sup> Their country is usually located on both sides of Northern Botnia, but on the famous Olaf Magnus *Magna Carta Marina*, that is dated 1555, Kvenland is missing, but a small-print inscription south of Tromso reads “Berkara Qvenar”, that is “Kven Berkars” of the Kven itinerant traders. Hilda Ellis Davidson states – though without giving the source of the information – that the Kvens, together with the Biarms and the Finns (that is, the ancestors of the Saamis of today), supported themselves hunting wild reindeer and breeding the animal (Davidson 1979), but other sources are silent about it. Possibly they were one of the numerous West Finnish tribes assimilated by the Suomenlaiset, or Suomi Finns, during their later expansion. One has to

<sup>11</sup> At the moment we can see – particularly in internet – the trend of mythologizing the ancient Kvens and Kvenland, making them a local power, and placing their origins in the distant past. However, there are no grounds to accept the hypothesis of a once-strong, ancient state of the Kvens. On the other hand, the continuity of remarks on the subject in historical sources right up to modern times seems to suggest that the Kven tribe must have once played a very important role in the region.

stress that the Kvens of today are a new group that has no genetic continuity with the Kvens of old, and their name is clearly a transplanted ethnonym<sup>12</sup> which in Norwegian originally designated a Finn as such and a Karelian.

The contemporary Kvens are the descendants of the Finns who have been migrating from Northern Finland to Norway – to Finnmark and the Tromsø province – and who settled the Varanger Peninsula in late XIX century. They gave their new land the name Ruija<sup>13</sup>. Their migration was caused by bad harvests and famine in the Tornio River valley. The Norwegian administration, rather unfavourably disposed to the newcomers than to “fornorsking” (“Norwegianising”) policy prohibited them to use the Finnish language in schools and at offices. It is estimated that in 1815 the Kvens, for this is the historical name of the Finns in Norway, consisted 50% of the population of Tromsø and Finnmark (Niemi 1995). Regardless of that<sup>14</sup> the Finnish immigrants have preserved their identity while taking over the Norwegian name as ethnonym (“Kveeni” in Kven). Their religious confession – the radical Lutheranism known as Laestadianism – has helped them to preserve their own language (Raisanen, Kunnas 2012). Until the 70s of the XX century the Kvens officially did not exist, and the racist politics of the Norwegian authorities discriminated against them just as it did against the Saamis. The changes in Norwegian thinking following the collapse of global colonialism and the emancipating radicalization of the Saamis (Ryymän 2001) resulted in the official stopping the discrimination. In 1977 King Olav V of Norway, in the presence of Urho Kekkonen the President of Finland and Carl XVI Gustav the king of Sweden, officially unveiled the monument in Vadso that is dedicated to the Kvens<sup>15</sup>.

It is difficult to estimate the number of the Kvens, since during the pasts population censuses they preferred not to declare the Kven nationality thanks to the Norwegian policy of discrimination against them<sup>16</sup>. The official figures have for long been deliberately lowered by the Norwegian authorities (Lie 2002). Even today, the estimate of the number of the Kvens and the Kven language users is conditioned by who makes such attempts: the local authorities speak of 10-15 thousand people, the Kvens, of 50 thousand.<sup>17</sup> As late as in the 1980s the number of Kven speakers was estimated at 1,5-2 thousand (Lindgren 1993), while today the Kven language speakers amount 5-7 thousand (up to 10 thousand according to the Kven organizations). The long lack of one literary standard and the scattering of the Kven population reflect in the considerable dialect differentiation of the language (Plate 2).

The society known as *Norske Kvener Forbund* or *Ruijan Kveeniliitto* was set up in 1987, and the struggle for emancipation resulted in gaining by the Kvens the official ethnic minority status in 1996. In 2005 the Kven language finally got the status of a minority language (Petryk 2005). The language, called *Kveenin* or *Kainu Kieli*, is closest to the Finnish ethnolect known as Meankieli. It absorbed a number of words from Norwegian, Swedish, and the Saami languages, while its modern lexicon shows numerous Norwegian borrowings (Raisanen, Kunnas 2012). The standardization of the language, necessary for the development of

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<sup>12</sup> This is what I call ethnonyms taken over from the anthropological or cultural substratum by the new, alien peoples superimposing themselves upon the substrata or the mythologicalized ethnic “labels” borrowed for geographic or other reasons (compare the Macedonians of today).

<sup>13</sup> This name already appears in the Kalevala and refers to the northern coasts (of Scandinavia?).

<sup>14</sup> A relief was kept that the Finns were a kind of “Russian danger”, as Finland was at that time a part of the Russian Empire.

<sup>15</sup> This city, situated on the southern coast of the Varanger Peninsula, is considered to be an unofficial capital of the Kvens.

<sup>16</sup> Even today the Kvens, just like the Saamis, feel that they are discriminated against by the Norwegians (compare Hansen et al. 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Most probably the initial number of the Finnish emigrants in mid – XIX century was several times larger (ten times larger, according to some sources!).

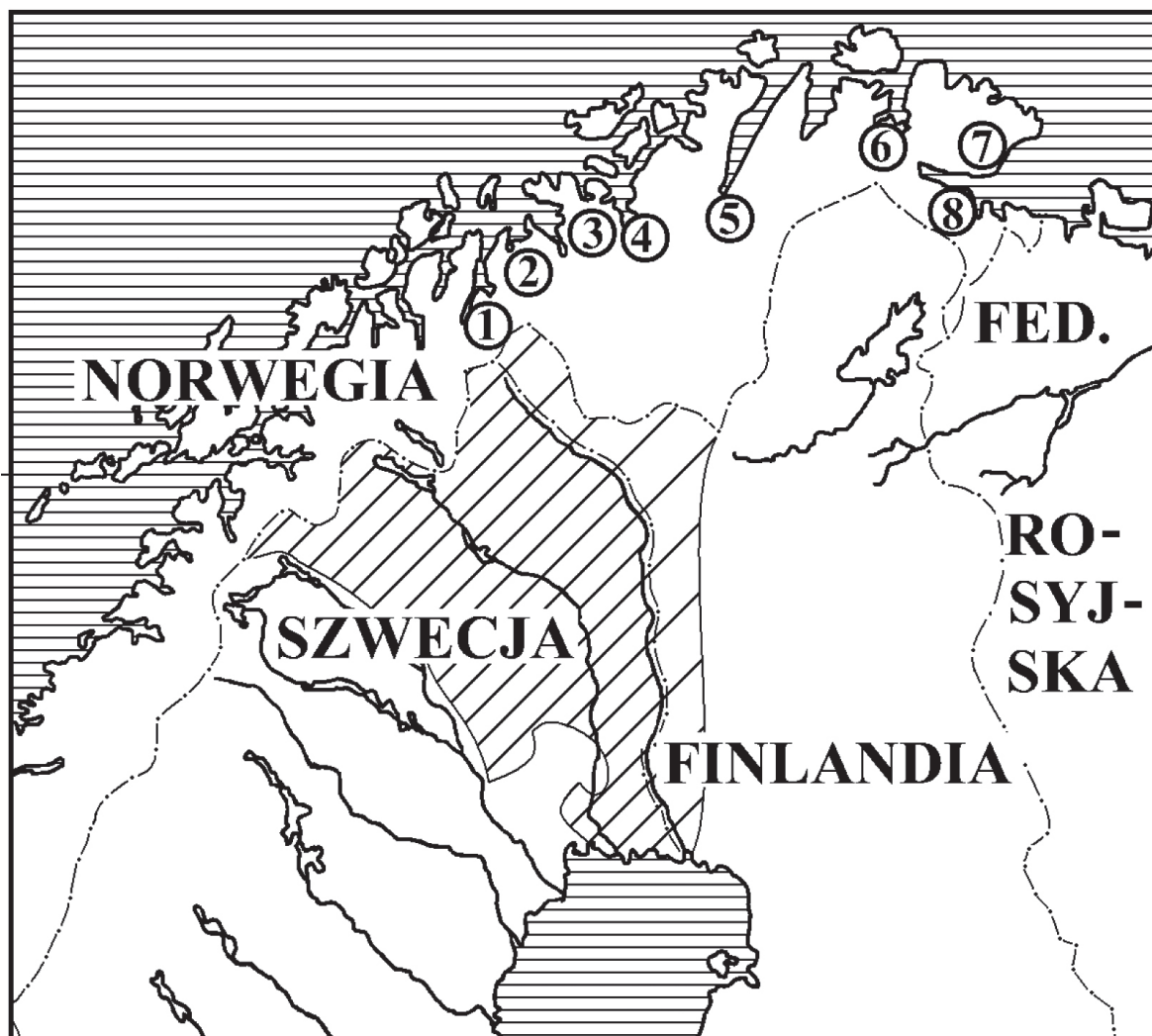


Plate II: Distribution of the Kven dialects and the Meankieli ethnolect area in Sweden and Finland (orig.). Following the pattern by the web page [www.kvenskinstitt.no](http://www.kvenskinstitt.no) the figures stand for: – the western dialects: 1 – Lungen, 2 – Nordreisa, 3 – Kvaenangen, 4 – Alta, 5 – Porsanger – the eastern dialects: 6 – Tana, 7 – Nord-Varanger, 8 – Sr-Varanger. The Meankieli area is hachured. On the Swedish side the administrative units in which it is a minority language are marked. On the Finnish side the same is marked only in general, on the basis of several different sources.

literacy and education in it, has been ongoing since 2007 under the aegis of the Kven Language Council (in Norwegian, *spraakraad*), and since 2009 under the guidance of the Kven Institute.

The partly-lost Kven culture<sup>18</sup> is being restituted by the *Kven Institutet* in Borselv, the *Halti Kvenkultursenter* in Nordreisa, and the *Ruija Kven Museum* in Vadso. The Kven festivals, first organized in 2007, are becoming increasingly popular. Since 2006 the language is present at the Tromsø University, and the literature in Kven is emerging. There also exists the Kven newspaper called *Ruijan Kaiku*.

It seems of no doubt that the Kven identity is presently being built on the foundation of language (Petryk 2014). It is of interest that the Kven community, in its emancipation proc-

<sup>18</sup> Until very recently the scholars were convinced that the original Kven culture has already vanished (compare Anttonen 2014).

ess, has not taken advantage of the ideas of Pan-Finnism<sup>19</sup> and instead of trying to be recognized as a Finnish minority (*Suomenlaiset*), has preferred Middle Ages as the key of identity. However, it may be expected that the current tendencies may result in the mythologising of the Cvenia of old and the emergence of the foundation myth that is necessary for each and every ethnos.

### Meänkieli – “Our Language”

The present Swedish-Finnish border along the Torne/Tornio River<sup>20</sup> follows to a considerable extent the old border dividing the Western and Eastern Lapps along the Tornio and Kemi Rivers watershed (Storaa 1971). Before the Swedish and Finnish settlers made their way north, they had been divided by the lands that had been settled – right until the end of the Middle Ages – by the Kvens of old and the ancestors of the Saami of today.<sup>21</sup> Only after the Saamis retreated northwards did the Torne River valley become the main route of the Finnish settlers’ migration. In 1809, when Finland was annexed by Russia, the Treaty of Hamina demarcated the border according to the then-customary European pattern, that means drawing it along the rivers<sup>22</sup> (Tornio and Muonio). The frontier split into two the Finnish community using two closely related dialects (*Tornio* and *Gallivare*, both belonging to the *Perapohjola* group of the Finnish dialects). Nearly half of the so-divided Finns found themselves in Sweden (ca.8 thousand), the rest remained in the east, in Finland (11 thousand). As Thomas Lunden (2011) points out, this situation was and still is typical for the whole of Europe, where most of the borders cut through the language areas. The Finnish – speaking population of North-East Sweden was officially forgotten in those days, and the new frontier increased the distinctness of its dialect (Heyerd 1992).

The policy of Swedization of the Finnish population of the Tornio Valley, parallel to the Norwegianization of the Kvens in the north, has been going on since the early XX century. A new wave of Finnish migration was caused by the revolutions in Russia (Lunden 2011). The interwar period in Sweden was marked by the clear rise of racist tendencies, reflecting in the negative attitudes towards the Swedish Finns. The Meänkieli language was officially persecuted, while schools had an informal prohibition of using any other language but Swedish by the students. This, obviously, had to have a negative influence on study results, life success, and unemployment among the Finns of Sweden. Anne Heith states, in so many words, that the Swedish policy of internal colonization and interwar racism have finally brought about the reaction of the Finnish-speaking Tornedalians who no longer wanted to be “the Negroes of Sweden” (Heith 2012). Their feeling of harm is demonstrated by the fact that the first Meänkieli grammar included an antiracist poem as one of the exemplary texts in the language (Pohjanen, Kenttä 1996)<sup>23</sup>.

The debate on the place of Finnish in the Swedish community has started in the 1950s. (Lunden 2011). The Swedish conservatives insisted that bilingualism leads to the collapse of the language, and besides, they preferred the standard Finnish language to the Meänkieli. Also the Finns tried to enforce the standard Finnish language in Tornedalen, but the at-

<sup>19</sup> The fear of Pan-Finnism, the idea common in Finnish thinking, might be one of the reasons of discriminating against the Kvens, particularly in the light of Finland’s cooperation with Hitler’s Germany (Ryymin 2001)

<sup>20</sup> We use both Swedish and Finnish names here, as the current Polish atlases give double names.

<sup>21</sup> Here we allow some simplification of description, as a detailed explanation of the Saami problem would go far beyond the limitations of the present paper.

<sup>22</sup> In the North, rivers were the main communication routes, and not infrequently the only ones, and so they connected rather than divided, and frontiers followed the watersheds.

<sup>23</sup> That means the valleys of Northern Dvina and Mezen.

tempt was rejected. The local population had no doubts that the Suomi-Meankieli relation were asymmetric. The language problem in Tornio Valley was further complicated by the fact that the Finnish-side dialect (*Tornion Murre*), while being de facto Meankieli, was slowly developing towards standard Finnish (*Suomi*), the developments on the Swedish side were wholly different. Besides the local Finnish and Swedish Meankieli speakers – and the local activists tried to make the language different from standard Finnish – there appeared a number of new Finnish immigrants speaking Suomi, that is standard Finnish (Vattovaara 2009). Although the cross-border contacts are very much alive today and the Finns from both sides have no problems communicating with each other, the administrative difficulties are on the increase. The old relationship of the dialects diminishes and there may come the need of having interpreters or of using school English as the intermediary language rather soon (Lunden 2011). Denis Zalamans (2002) quotes an interesting comparison of the situation in two border towns, Harapanda in Sweden and Tornio in Finland (Table 1). Lunden stresses that being Finnish in Sweden was always humiliating, and therefore the Finnish self-identification in Harapanda is certainly lowered, similarly to the knowledge of Meankieli in Tornio.

Meankieli, common in preschool education on the Swedish side of the border, gives way to standard Finnish in schools, which is facilitated by the ease of cross-border educational exchange. The status of Meankieli in higher education is still lower, as most of the Swedish Finns prefer to study in Finland, even though it has legally been allowed to use Meankieli at the universities since 2000 (Bodrogi 2008). This is now possible at Lulea, Stockholm, and Umea (Huss, Lindgren 2005).

The first Tornedalians organization – *Svenska Tornedalingars Riksforbund-Torniolaaksolaitet* – was set up in 1998, while the first private school with the Meankieli language in Norbotten was organized at Pajala in 1993. Both the Kvens and the Tornedalians of the late XX century built their identity on the fundamentals of language. The Finns of Finland, who regarded both as speakers of wrong and impure form of the language (the building of the Finnish identity in the XIX c. was based on care for language purity), have also contributed to it. As a result, both the Kvens and the Finns of Tornedalen, already discriminated against by the Swedes and the Norwegians, have turned to resist their own countrymen and to create their own self-identification on the basis of this “wrong and impure” language (Bodrogi 2008).

It is interesting that the cultural activity of the Meankieli and the Saami minorities is higher than the Swedish one in the same areas (Winsa 2005). This may be the result of the state financial support, but also of the growing self-identification.

The Swedish education system, while supposed to protect the interests of language minorities, is both complicated and extremely formalized.

It allows numerous choices by the students, which in connection with the opportunism of the youth does not augur well for the teaching of Meankieli which is not a compulsory language. This is further obstructed by the executory rules and the lack of competent teachers. As a result, the bilingual education plays only a marginal role, and almost in principle the learning of Meankieli takes place at home under the supervision of the parents. The distinct status of the language is often questioned, all the more so since the young monolingual Swedes have a negative attitude to Meankieli and the Saami languages, which is painfully obvious to their contemporaries who speak minority languages. This has a negative influence on the attitude to the language and the choice of self-identification. The young of Tornedalen believe that the Finns who speak standard Finnish also share the negative attitude to them, though this generally does not refer to the Finns living in Tornedalen (Arola, Kunnas, Winsa 2015).

Finnish (*Suomi*) is today Sweden’s second language as far as the number of speakers is concerned (ca.200-250 thousand), while the population speaking Meankieli is estimated at

15-45 thousand, though there exist much higher estimations reaching 75-100 thousand. The number of speakers of it has dropped by 40% over the past 25 years. There are now 18 administrative regions, including Stockholm, where the language is officially recognized (Parkval 2009).

## The Pomors

The identity of no group discussed so far stirs up so much emotions as the question of the Pomors. It is also the only one whose “Uralic character” is a matter of dispute. The Pomors of today are the remnant of once much larger group living along the coasts of the White Sea and the Dvina River (Piasecki 2009). Its origins reach to late Middle Ages, when the Novgorod and “Nizh”<sup>24</sup> settlers arrived in the north, assimilating the local population substratum – Karelian, Veps, “Tchud” (“North Finnish”<sup>25</sup>) and Saami, all of them linguistically Uralic (Bernstam 1978). The ethnolect based on all this (*Pomorskaya govora*) is clearly different from the other North Russian dialects both phonetically and lexically. Its reach (Plate 3) is the best demonstration of the reach of Pomorian culture. This culture, religiously Orthodox right from its beginnings, has absorbed a large number of local and pagan elements which included hunting (with special reference to sea mammals), fishing, sub-Arctic nature, and the spiritual borrowings. As the cold climate seriously limited the possibilities of agriculture and cattle breeding, the Pomors rather early based their survival and subsistence on “sea harvesting”. Expanding and penetrating economically more and more towards north and west, as far as Spitsbergen and Novaya Zemla<sup>26</sup>, they showed intense development of ship-building. They have also markedly contributed to the first stage of the conquest of Siberia (Vize 1948, Azjatin et.al. 1979, Ciporukha 2004).

The development of their identity was originally conditioned by the specific demands of sea-based economy. This was further strengthened by the confessional element. Following the Nikon Reforms (1656-56), they declared themselves on the Old Liturgy side and became one of the strongest *rozkol* camps. The Solovetsky Monastery was the main point of the Old Faith followers’ resistance against the new liturgy and the power of the Tsars. Later on the St. Michael Archangelsk Monastery at the mouth of the Dvina River became the sacral centre of Pomorye and gave its name to the city of Archangel that was raised just next to the Monastery in 1613. The Pomors had a very special attachment to the cult of St. Nicholas, the patron of sailors and traders. They called him “speedy helper”, as when in need of help at high seas he was believed to come to help himself and directly, not merely by taking the supplications of the faithful to God. The area of Pomorye knows the saying, rhyming in the original Russian, “It is 33 Nicholse from Kholmogory to Kola”, meaning that there are 33 temples, chapels, and crosses dedicated to St. Nicholas along the sea route from the old Pomorye capital at Kholmogory to the mouth of the Kola River in the north of Kola Peninsula<sup>27</sup>. The crosses, when placed at visible sites along the coast and oriented to the sides of the world, have also functioned as navigation marks. They were also erected on the intention of a successful voyage or in gratitude for saving life. Even today we can see them along northern shores from Spitsbergen up to Novaya Zemla (Filin, Frizin 2001; Lebedeva 2015).

<sup>24</sup> The so called “lower colonization” included the settlers arriving from the Suzdal-Rostov Russ (Bernstam 1978, Dubrovin et. al 2001, compare Piasecki 2009, p.15).

<sup>25</sup> Some Uralic scholars tend to distinguish the North Finnish languages the West Finnish ones (Kuratov 1983). These would include some of the lost ethnolects of the area under discussion.

<sup>26</sup> The British and Dutch expeditions report meeting the Pomors in the northern seas in the XVI century. The Pomorye seamen rescued the castaways of Barents’ expedition in 1597 (de Vejr 2011).

<sup>27</sup> At the turn XIX/XX centuries more than half the chips and sailboats registered in Archangelsk were named after St. Nicholas.



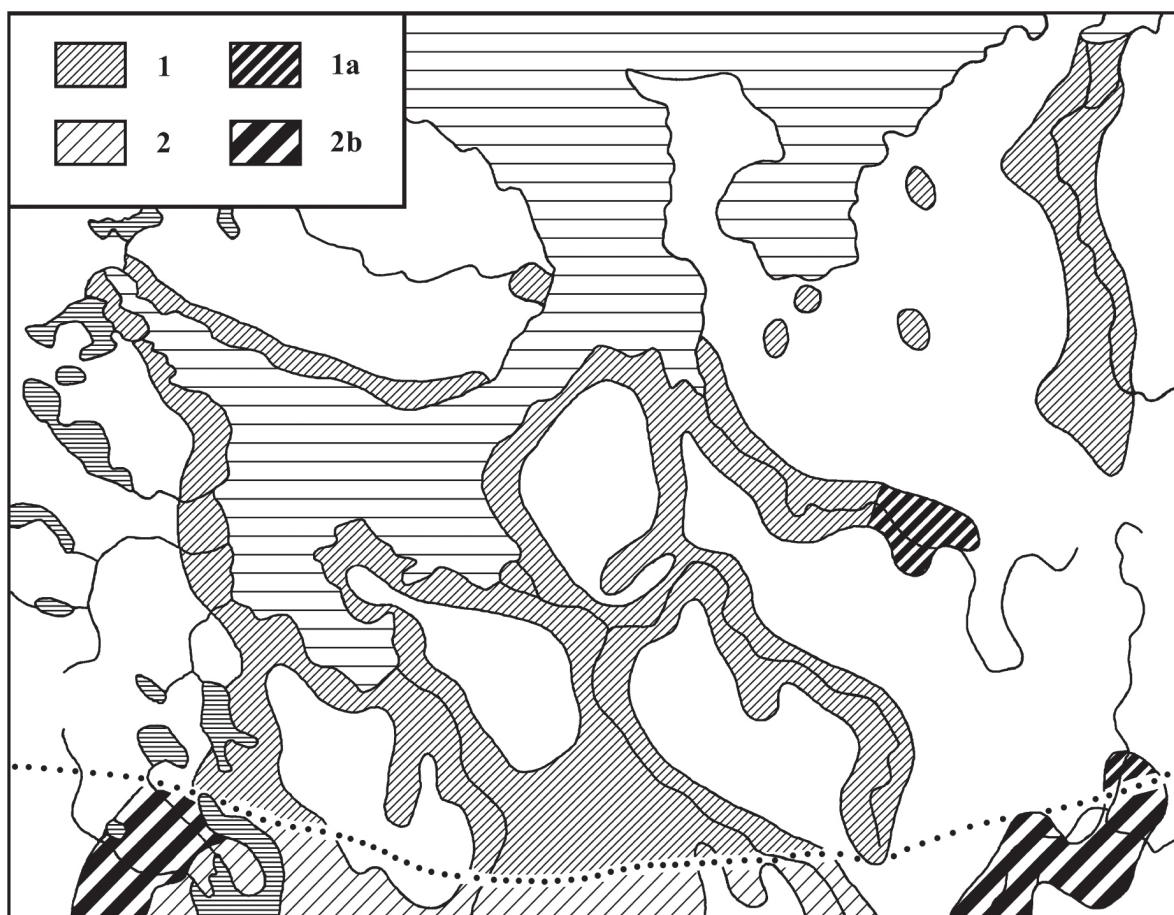


Plate III: The Pomore ethnolect area (Piasecki, in the press). The figures stand for: 1 – Pomore dialects, 2 – other North Russian dialects, 1a and 2a – the areas of mixed population (with non-Russian populations)

Let us come back to the ethnonym. The name Pomors (also Pomorye and Pomorianie) appears for the first time in 1562 when “Pomors from the Ocean sea and Kondalaksha Bay, as well as the Lapps, requested the building of a church”<sup>28</sup>. For a long time the term designated those leasing for “Murman”, that is the northern shores of the Kola Peninsula, for fishing and hunting sea mammals. The “Pomorye” version<sup>29</sup> spread together with the Old Faith followers, who have finally united and created the “Pomorye Agreement” (Rus. “Pomorske Soglasie”). Later on the name Pomor was expanded for the entire coast of the White Sea and all the inhabitants of the Russian North, and in particular for those living in the gubernias or districts of Archangel, Vologda and Olonets (Ul’janov 1984). The name of the ethnonym was transferred to the country; on the principle: Pomors – the inhabitant of Pomorye. The actual Pomorye is the White Sea coast from Onega to Kem, known as Pomorye Coast.

The following territorial groups of the Pomors are distinguished:

- the actual Pomors living in Pomorsky-, Summer-, and parts of the Karelian Coast
- the Kandalaksha Bay Pomors, also called “Gubyans” (from “guba”, the bay) or “Piakka”

<sup>28</sup> “Pomortsy s moria Okiyana iz Kondolakskoy guby prosili v meste s loplianami ustroistva tserkvi” (Ul’janov 1984).

<sup>29</sup> In the Polish literature the name “Pomorcy” is more common than “Pomorzenie”, which allows to distinguish them from the Baltic Pomeranians. The simple translation of the Russian name “Pomorye” into the Polish “Pomorzy” does not seem appropriate because of its clearly pejorative character.

- the Terski Coast Pomors, also called “Terchans” and “Rokkans”<sup>30</sup>
- the Ust-Tsylemtsy and the Pustoziertsy<sup>31</sup>
- the Kanintsi or Kanin Pomors, living in the Kanin Peninsula, in which case only 7 people declared this nationality in the 2002 census<sup>32</sup>.

It is interesting to have a look at the attitude of those living in the White Sea Pomorye to the ethnonym “Pomor”, as this is undoubtedly crucial for the Pomorian self-identification. Depending at which “Coast” they live<sup>33</sup>, they regarded themselves and their countryman from other “Coasts” as the true (real) Pomors or non-Pomors. Tatiana Bernshtam quotes the field work showing that, for example, those living in the settlements at the mouth of Dvina River did not call themselves Pomors (“no, never not even one word about it”). Those from the Pomorsky Coast claimed: “They did not go from Kandalaksha to Murman, They may call themselves Pomors all right, but to us they are not Pomors”, On the other hand, those living at the Onega Coast say about their neighbours from the Summer Coast: “They are not Pomors, they planted potatoes and grew cereals” (Bernshtam 1978). One gets the impression that there existed something like “the heart of Pomorian-ship” situated at the Pomorsky Coast, and the farther from it, the weaker the feeling of it, Even though the term Pomors has become popular some still insist that the only true Pomors are those who sail “beyond Murman”, that is to the Barents and Norwegian Seas, for their voyages.

There is no doubt that right until the early XX century the population of the White Sea coasts have not thought of themselves as of one ethnos (Bernshtam 1978). With the setting up of the city of Archangelsk the importance of the Kola River and the Moscow-Kola route decreased, and fishing and hunting moved to east-north coasts of the Kola Peninsula. Those living in the eastern “Coasts” began to take active part in it in the XVII century. and it was at that time the concept of Pomorye got much extended.

Today we can clearly see the rise of self-identification of Pomors. This is caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union and parallel cryptodomination of the Velkorus’ ethnos or the Russians. The process is of much interest to researchers, which is clearly shown by the increasing number of publications on the subject<sup>34</sup>. The process of Pomors emancipation has recently become too much political. This resulted in the peculiar mythologization of Pomorenness on one hand, and on the other hand, in accusing the Pomors of nationalism, undermining the unity of Russia, and even of anti-state activities (Sabaev 2011). The Pomors activists are accused of “destroying” the unity of the “Severyans” (Northern Russians, from *sever* – north) and confronting the allegedly non-Slavic Pomors with the Slavic “Northerners”. Ivan Moseev the leading apologist of Pomorian identity, writes: “the native culture of the Pomorye people cannot be viewed as exclusive Slavic because it preserved the ancient Finno-Ugric stratum that is of fundamental importance to Pomorian identity” (Moseev 2004). This is totally unacceptable to the contemporary Great Russian nationalists, who openly accuse the Pomorye intellectual elites of national betrayal and willingness to hand over the Russian Arctic to the West (Shemushin 2013).

The creation of the Soviet Union meant for the Pomors – just like it did for a number of other ethnic minorities – the enforced loss of self-identity. If we add to it the considerable internal migrations, particularly the professional ones connected with the sea economy and the development of the Russian Navy one should not be surprised that the census of 2002

<sup>30</sup> Both “Piakka” and “Rokka” come from the Karelian language.

<sup>31</sup> The Ust-Tsilems, that is the inhabitants of Ust-Tsilema and its surroundings, have been creating their own identity in the recent years (Shabaev, Dronova, Sharapov 2010).

<sup>32</sup> It has already been singled out by Sergey Tokaryev (Tokarev 1958).

<sup>33</sup> The particular sections of the White Sea shores have been called “coasts”. It was connected with their non-simultaneous settling, varying characteristics, and it also facilitated navigation.

<sup>34</sup> Compare Vitalij Anufriev (2008): *Russkie pomorye. Kulturno-istoriceskaia identichnost’*.

returned the amount of only 6571 Pomors (6295 of them in the Archangelsk District). and the census of 2010 listed only 3113 of them. So rapid a decline may only be explained by the anti-Pomors campaign stirred up by central authorities and the Russian nationalists, because in the same period we can see a very clear increase in the activities of Pomorye organizations and institutions as well as in the number of publications devoted to Pomorye and the Pomors. Even more so, if we compare the above figures with the results of the censuses conducted at all Pomorye "Coasts" in the years 1858-1859 (29,1 thousand) and 1926 (79,7 thousand) (Bernshtam 1978), we can clearly see that if we include the demographic tendencies the descendants of old Pomors should today number at least a hundred thousand or more. Even assuming that most of them lost their old identity the figure of three thousand seems considerably lowered.

The Pomorian ethnos was the result of mixing of genes and cultures of the old ethnic substratum and the earliest Slavic settlers. It was<sup>35</sup> and still is surrounded by the various non-Slavic, Uralic-speaking peoples:

- from the south – the Veps and the Izhma Komi
- from the west – the Karelians
- from the north – the Kola Peninsula Saamis<sup>36</sup>
- from the north-east – the Nenets.

In the past few dozen years the arranging of mixed marriages, much more frequent today than in days of old, resulted in the dramatic fall of the number of the Pomors. A large part of it, maybe the largest, could be credited to the marriages of ethnic Pomors with the ethnic Velikorusy<sup>37</sup> and the members of ethnic and national minorities acculturated by them.

Small wonder, then, that the Pomorian ethnolect developed independently of the Great Russia dialects which eventually gave rise to the Russian literary language. The richness, the individual lexicon, and the phonetics of Pomorian ethnolect make it very different from the modern Russian language in both phonetics and lexicon. In its lexicon we have numerous borrowings from "north Finnish" languages, Saami languages and Germanic (first of all Norwegian), as well as very rich vocabulary consisting primarily of specific neologisms concerning the sea, sailing fishing, and hunting (Merkur'ev 1979). They also have a rich vocabulary connected with various types of ice<sup>38</sup>, winds<sup>39</sup>, and types of the coasts. The richness of the Pomorian speech is clearly testified by the fact that the 10 volumes of the Archangelsk District Dictionary, covering the entries from A to D, comes up to 170 thousand lexical units! (Russki yazyk i ego pomorskie i sibirskie rostvenniki 2008), and the Pomore grammar "Pomorska govoriija" by Ivan Moiseyev, published in 2005, includes two thousand five hundred words. The Pomorian ethnolect area covers the broadly-understood Pomorye and embraces the White Sea shores up to the Onega Lake in the west, and the river valleys of lower Mezen and Pechora in the east (Plate 3).

A point of special interest for the Norwegian-Pomorye contacts is the artificial language known as russenorsk called *kak-sperk* in Norwegian and *moja-po-twoja* in Pomorian. It contained about 300-350 words and facilitated communication between seamen and traders of

<sup>35</sup> It remain surrounded so until the early XX century.

<sup>36</sup> The Saamis of the Kola Peninsula, who belong to the East Lappish language group, are not a uniform ethnos, in spite of the common view. They are called Skolt ("of Kola") by Western researchers, and linguistically they divide into four ethnolects: Ter, Kildin, Akkala, and Kolt (the proper Skolt). The last group is also internally differentiated as far as the dialect is concerned (Kent 2003).

<sup>37</sup> We use the term in purely technical sense, without ascribing any political coloring to it.

<sup>38</sup> The Pomors use over a hundred names to designate ice. One of them – *gruma* or *grumana* stands for blocks of ice that fall off icebergs into the sea. This clearly connects with the Pomorian name of Spitsbergen – "Grumant".

<sup>39</sup> Compare Porch 1983, Gemp 2004, Piasecki 2012.

both countries. It contained 35% of Russian words, 45% of the Norwegian ones, and the remainder was taken from Finnish and other languages (Pomorska strona... 2004). The flourishing of this language at the turn of XIX/XX centuries at the time of extremely extensive Pomorye-Norway trade contacts, came to an end with the creation of the Soviet Union.

The rich spiritual and material culture of the Pomors was thoroughly investigated by ethnographers, anthropologists, linguists, and historians (Bernshtam 1978, 1983, Bulatov 1997-2001; Russkij Sever . . . 2004; Bazarova et. al. 2005; Anufriev 2008; Shemushin 2013). The role of the Pomors in the conquest of Siberia, the exploration of the Arctic, and in the development of Russia, is unquestionable. However, when the Pomors Congress held at Archangelsk in 2007 proclaimed the existence of the Pomorian nationality, the government treated it as a state-subversive activity. The extent of anti-Pomorye state propaganda makes one amazed if we are to believe that, according to the last census, there are only some three thousand of them. Regardless of the future political developments connected with the Pomorye problem it is of no doubt that the role of the Pomors in the history and culture of Russia is important, and their ethnic self-identification should not be put in doubt.

A part of the Pomorye population, as well as the Izhma Komi discussed below, follows the traditional economy until today. The fundamental problem for them is whether they should be placed on the list of the so-called small<sup>40</sup> native peoples of the North and Siberia. The constitutional status of those nationalities is connected with special care of the state and numerous privileges like fishing quotas, hunting limits, freeing from taxes and free use of natural resources and environment. After all, the gradual loss of access to the sea resources was one of the reasons of the disappearance of the Pomors. The neighbouring Saami and Nenets have no limitations in reindeer pasturing and the use of the environment. They also have officially granted fish and sea mammal quotas, which they do not make full use of but resell to the Pomors. At the same time most of the leaders of the Pomors movement are city-dwellers, a part of which no doubt connects its political activities with Pomorness (Shabaev Dronova, Sharapov 2010).

## The Izhma Komi

The Finnish-Perm, language branch divides into Permian Komi and Zyrian Komi. The latter one included several groups (Shabaev 2000) and among them – Izhma Komi. The Komi-Izhem (their own ethnonym is *Izvatas'*, from the Komi name of the river Izhma). Their ancestors – a part of Zyrian Komi – moved north (Lashuk 1956) to escape the pressure from Moscow Rus'<sup>41</sup>, and settled the valleys of Vychegda, Izhma, Pechora, and Usa (Zerebcov 2002; Savel'eva, Korolev 2007). The creation process of the ethnos, started in the XVI century, ended, finally in the XVIII c. (Konakov Kotov 1999). Superimposing on the local "Tchud" ("North Finnish") anthropological and linguistic substratum, as well as mixing with the Slavic settlers and the Nenets reindeer shepherds, the Komi created a specific culture based on reindeer breeding for trade (Shabaev, Jironova, Sharanov 2010). Expanding northwards together with them, the Izhma Komi reached the Kanin and Kola Peninsulas, Kolguyev Island, and on their travels east word (Filatova 1994) crossed the Ural and Ob Rivers (Plate 3). Their success was the result of joining elements of the Nenets traditional economy with the processing of reindeer skins – primarily for suede – with long-range

<sup>40</sup> In the sense of small number (Rus. *korennyy malocislennyy narod*).

<sup>41</sup> Mostly because of enforced Christianization started in the 80s of the XIV century by bishop Stefan (later on, St. Stefan of Perm). This coincided with the same expansion that gave rise to the Pomors.

trade (even on international scale) without the use of intermediaries. Living a semi-nomadic way of life and settled permanently in village-type settlements, they have originally been breeding reindeer in their farms, and subsequently, taking advantage of the hired Nenets shepherds for grazing, have creatively taken over their technology of animal breeding as well as a large part of their material culture. They developed animal breeding on a large scale, and their flocks grazing in European tundras increased from 30 thousand in the XVII c. to 200 thousand in the XIX c (Kotov 2000). Zyrianski reports that in the 40s of the XIX century the Izhma Komi herds in the Archangelsk district were four times larger than the Nenets ones (Shabaev, Dronova, Sharanov 2010<sup>42</sup>). In the forest-tundra areas, just like in their former homeland, they subsided on hunting and fishing, and to a considerably lower degree, on agriculture and cattle-breeding. Moving northwards, the Komi have gradually abandoned cattle-breeding in favour of reindeer-breeding, but without abandoning the settled way of life and still supplementing reindeer breeding with hunting and fishing. They have first lived in typically Zyrian houses and farms, but as their wealth increased these were enlarged and ornamented in the Russian style until they looked almost Pomorian (Rogatchev 2000).

Even though the Izhma Komi way of life did not differ outwardly from the Nenets, the trade-oriented reindeer breeding decided about their approaching the Russian culture. Their early accepting the Orthodox faith (most of the Izhma Komi are of Old Faith), their knowledge of the Russian language and smaller cultural distance between them and the Russians have also played an important role. At the turn of XIX/XX centuries their level of life has in fact equaled the one of the rich Pomors.

The distinct way of life, language, and culture originated the Izhma Komi strong emancipation movement that was based on contrasting the Izhma Komi and the Zyrians within the Komi community (Anufrieva 2007). The Izhma Komi have for long differed from the Zyrians not only by the specific features of their economy, but also by their dialect, clothes, and opening onto Russian culture (Terebikhin, Neskanelis 2008). Paradoxically, after the Komi Republic was established and schooling in Zyrian Komi began, the Izhma Komi demanded schooling in Russian. There were known cases of burning language primers and school textbooks printed in the Komi language (Shabaev, Dronova, Sharapov 2010). This was followed by the temporary loss of self-identity in favour of the general Komi, that is Zyrian one (in the 70s and 80s of the previous century), which gave place to the feeling of “Izhmaness” in the 90s<sup>43</sup>.

All this culminated in including the Izhma Komi in the census form in 2002 (even though the Izhma Komi have already appeared in census forms in 1926, although counted as a variant of the Zyrian Komi identification), which in fact meant recognizing them as a separate nationality. There were 16.5 thousand of them in 2002, 12.5 thousand of these in the Komi Republic (Shabaev, Dronova, Sharapov 2010). The remaining ones live mostly in the Murmansk District, the Yamal-Nenets District, and in the Khanty-Mansy Autonomous District. The broad scale of their distribution, caused by the necessity of having access to newer and

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<sup>42</sup> Obviously the renting of pasture grounds and the hiring of shepherds must have been to a certain disadvantage to the Nenets (mostly because of overtaking their own grazing grounds). N.A. Alekseev (1972) in his review of the collective monograph “Preobrazovaniya v khazajstve i kul'ture i etnitcheskie processy u narodov Severa” (Moscow 1970) remarks that Ludmila Khomitch is not right when claiming that the Izhma Komi did not exploit the Nenets. With the Izhma civilization superiority it was a natural phenomenon, although it should not be overestimated. What is really essential is the fact that at the same time the Nenets have suffered the greatest defeats in their fight for independence with the Tsarist administration. This no doubt must have facilitated the expansion of the pro-Russian Izhma Komi.

<sup>43</sup> It is interesting that both the Kola and Ob Izhma Komi did not think themselves different from the rest of the Zyrians (Kotov, Rogatchev, Shabaev 1969).

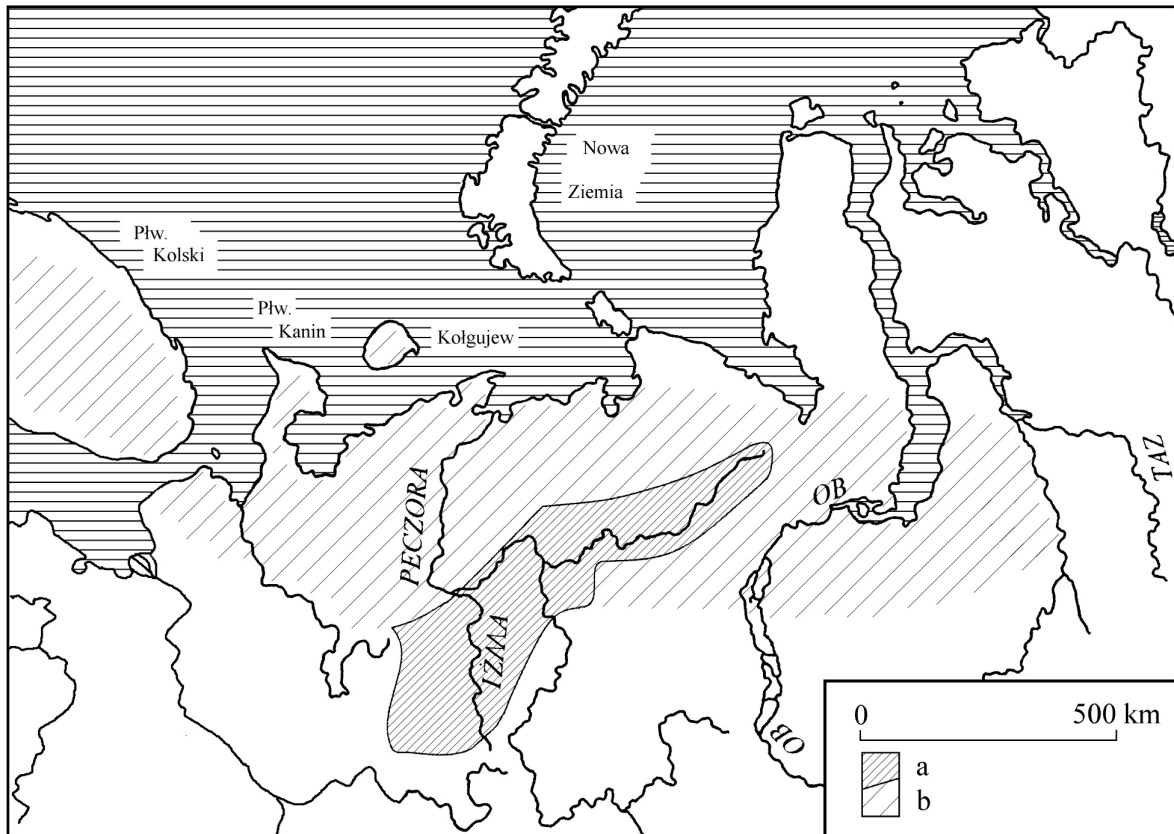


Plate IV: The contemporary settlements of the Izhma Komi (orig.). Explanation of symbols: a – the approximate continuous area of the Izhmian ethnolect in the Komi Republic (after Konakov 2000), b – the area where the Izhma Komi scattered (based on a number of sources, primarily on Filatova 1994)

still newer grazing grounds, clearly demonstrates the expansive character of this ethnos (Plate 4). The distance from the base of the Kola Peninsula to the mouth of the Taz River comes to two thousand kilometers. The Izhma Komi demand getting the status of the aboriginal peoples of the North, which would make their reindeer-breeding more profitable. One has to stress that the Izhma Komi identity has always been facilitated by the internal coherence and solidarity of the group<sup>44</sup>. It also needs stressing that the Izhma Komi self-identification concerns all the age groups to the same degree (Shabaev, Dronova Sharapov 2010).

### The Setu (*Seto*) and the Voro (*Võro*) language

The Setu of today, also known as the *Setukez*, are a part of the old West Finnish tribes out of which the Estonian nationality has formed. They live in south-east Estonia and in the Russian Federation (Plate 5). Their ancestors, neighbours of the Polotska Russ, have accepted Eastern Christianity<sup>45</sup> in the Middle Ages (Tokarev 1958, Surowiec 2005, Piasecki 2011). The ethnogenesis of the group remains unclear. It is generally accepted that they are an ethno-confessional group differing from the rest of the Estonian ethnos only by their Orthodox faith. This group is the effect of the southward migration of the population of the

<sup>44</sup> As regards organized forums, the Izhem are represented by the Interregional Social Movement "Iz'vatas".

<sup>45</sup> The remaining Estonians were conquered by the Danish and German crusaders in the XIII century and converted to Catholicism. After the Reformation they became Lutheran.

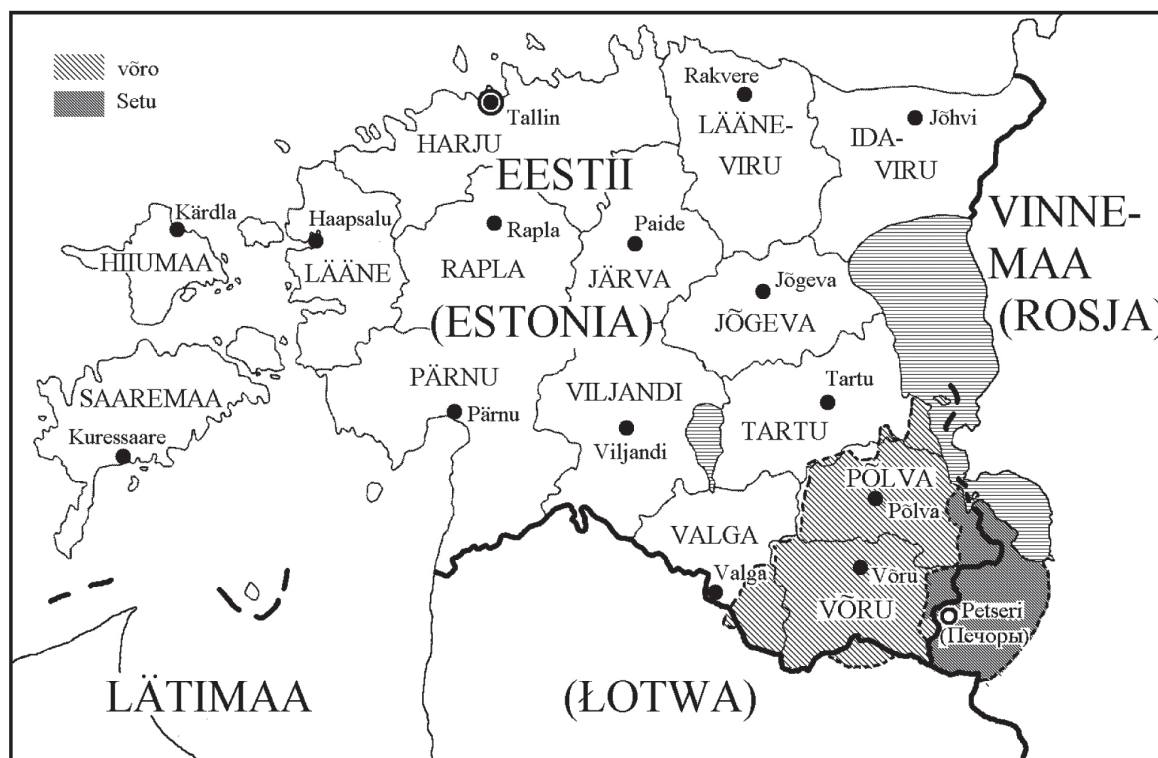


Plate V: The area of the Voro or South Estonian language and the Setu population (orig.)

Estonian province of Vorumaa, or possibly the remainder of the “Tchud” tribes<sup>46</sup>. Some try to derive them from a separate, autochthonic West Finnish tribe that was supposed to live in those areas since the third millennium BCE (Jaats 1997). The last proposal, supported by the majority of the Setu, forms one of the fundamental pillars of their self-identity. The ethnonym derives from the Estonian “sega” – “mixed” – and is usually explained on folk etymology basis “ei see ei tuu” which is supposed to mean “neither this nor that”, that is neither Estonian nor Russian (Grabowska 2000). The weakness of this derivation is almost too obvious<sup>47</sup>. Another name, slightly pejorative, is used on the Russian side of the border: “polvertsi” (literally “half-faith holders, half-believers”) supposedly alluding to their half-pagan character<sup>48</sup>. The small but compact area settled by them has formed the Estonian-Slavic borderland ever since the early Middle Ages (Moora, Moora 1960). Relatively early it came to be controlled by Polovtsy Rus, and subsequently became a part of the Polotsk administrative units of various kinds. After the Peace of Tartu in 1920 all of Setumaa or “Setu Land” became a part of Estonia. Towards the end of second world war, when Estonia was reincorporated into the USSR, a large part of Setu – including their religious centre in the Pechora Monastery – turned up on the Russian side, and a small group of them found themselves within Latvia (Plate 5). The 2002 census<sup>49</sup> informs us that there are about 10

<sup>46</sup> “Tchud” in old Russia meant either the West Finnish and “North Finnish” tribes in general, or some of them in particular. The ancestors of the Estonians of today, who formed a loose tribal federation in the Middle Ages, called themselves “Maarahwas” (“the people of the land”). It is them who are called “Tchud” in Old Russian sources, while the Peipus Lake in Russian is called the Tchud Lake.

<sup>47</sup> It is most probably an altered tribal name, possibly not Finnish, which might explain the appearance of paronymic attraction.

<sup>48</sup> Which, by the way, is correct.

<sup>49</sup> The census on the Russian side seems uncertain. Estonia questions the Estonian-Russian border in the reginn of Pechora (“Petserimaa” in Estonian). In question is the area of 1.585 square kilometres that became

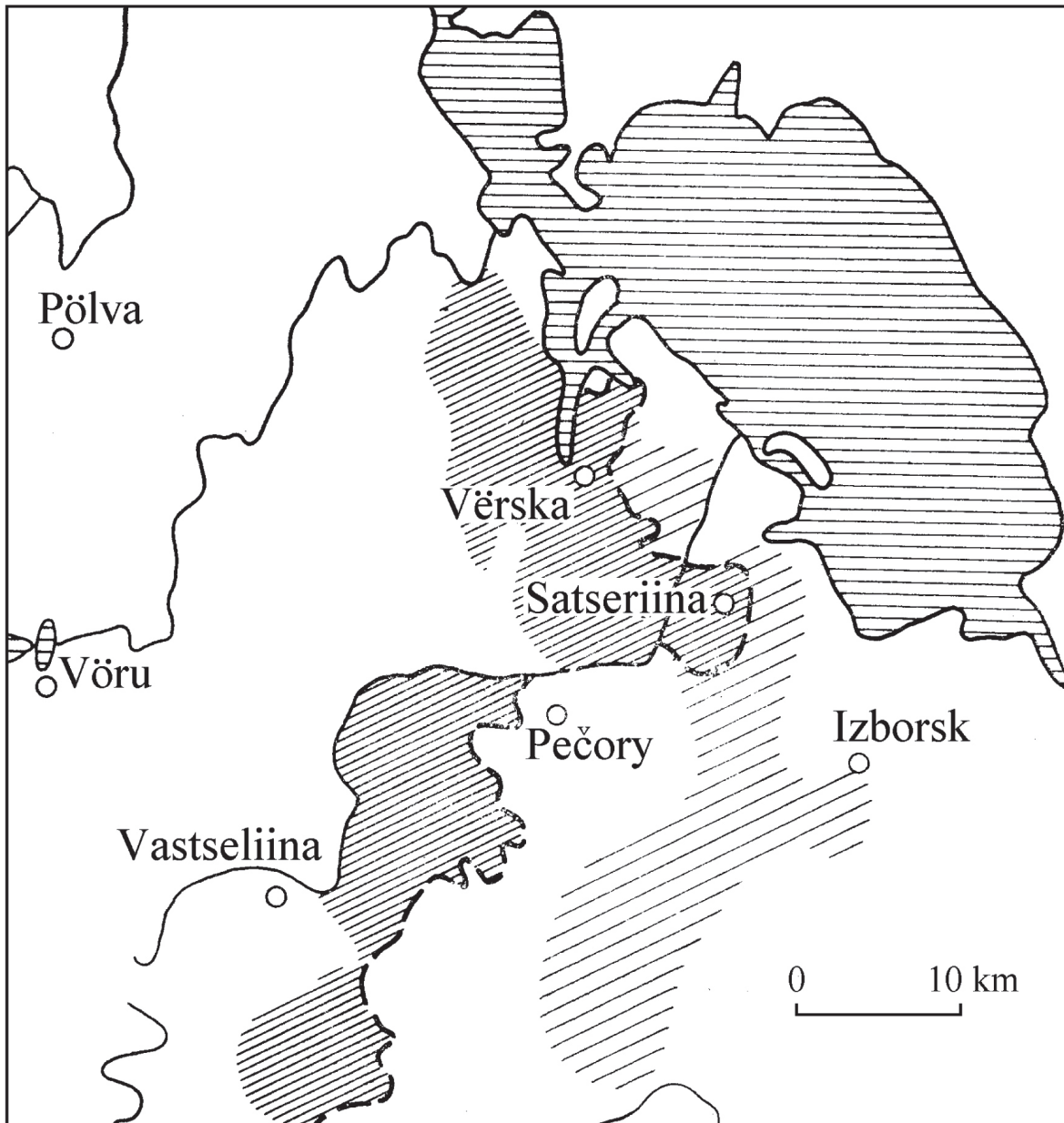


Plate VI: Distribution of the Setu after Richter 1978b, with some changes

thousand Setu in Estonia and 184 persons in the Russian Federation. The Setu are Christian Orthodox. They speak Voro, one of the dialects of South Estonian. Those in Russia speak the dialect with numerous Russian borrowings. Their cultural distinctness from the other Estonians remains very clear.

Their Orthodox faith seems to have always been rather superficial. This can be explained by their frequent ignorance of Russian and almost general ignorance of Setu or Estonian among the clergy of the region<sup>50</sup>. This is of no surprise that they have preserved a number

a part of Estonia under the terms of the Peace of Tartu, and is now a part of the Russian Federation, (Reissar 1906). This creates tensions, and the Setu population living on the Russian side does not declare belonging to the Setu nation in fear of repressions. Even prior to the disintegration of the USSR most of the Setu lived in the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic (Plate 6).

<sup>50</sup> As a result, unfortunately, the Setu were generally much worse educated than the remaining Estonians.



of residual pagan beliefs, rites, and customs (Jaats 1998). Their funeral rites are of particular interest (Richter 1979b). They have rich folklore, particularly songs, and their own epic poem "Peko" (Hagu, Suhonen 1995). Peko is also regarded a God by them. The scholars generally agree that their feeling of self-identification is closely connected with the syncretic character of Setu beliefs (Surowiec 2005).

The feeling of confessional distinctness strengthened the Setu self-identification. However, with the establishment of independent Estonia and her victorious war with Soviet Russia, belonging to the Setu came to be regarded as evidence of backwardness and lower social position. The numerous migrations from the Russian part of Setumaa to Estonia in the XX century have been parallel with the increasing identification of the Estonian Setu with the Estonians (Richter 1979a). The Setu self-identification became positive only after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Simultaneously, the contacts between the Estonian and Russian Setu have been interrupted. Their main religious centre – the Pechora Monastery, under which the mythological residence of their God Peko is located – became very difficult to access to the Estonian Setu.

The tribes that gave rise to the Estonian nation (*Maa rahvas*) spoke related dialects that consisted of two groups (Plate 5), northern and southern (Okulicz-Kozaryn 1993). In course of time language differences developed between the two. After the Reformation, when printing of Estonian religious texts began, there appeared problems connected with the question of unified literary standard (let us note that there appeared two translations of the Gospels, into North- and South- Estonian respectively). Eventually, the Northern dialect became dominating, though the differences between the two ethnolects have always been clear. The absence of any tendency to distinguish the two languages over the years was chiefly due to the dominating position of German in Estonian culture which was extremely strong and practically undeterred until the late XIX century (Lewandowski 2002). The emergence of Estonian feeling of national identity at the turn of XIX/XX centuries have not favored the creation of a second standard of the Estonian language, either.

The last few years and the EU support for regionalisms facilitate the spread of South Estonian. It slowly becomes a tourist attraction of the south of Estonia. The Voro language speakers amount to 50 thousand today, and even though it has the status of a regional language, it is not included in the list prepared "by the World Finnish-Language Congress (*IV Vsemirnyj kongres finno-ugorskich narodov* 2004), neither is Meankieli.

The above presentation, much abbreviated and simplified out of necessity and regarding only a limited part of Europe, shows that at present – and maybe as never before – the national (ethnic) matters are conditioned by the current political situation and the level of democratization. Where the democratic standards are high and their traditions long, the ethnic, language, or confessional minorities may themselves decide about their existence, even when the majority of society has a negative attitude towards them. At the low level of democratization the identity (self-identification) becomes hostage to the current political situation. Let us hope that preservation and restitution of regional cultural diversity will become an effective counterweight to the danger of cultural globalization in future.

**Table I:**

	Harapanda	Tornio
Citizenship	S 72%, F 21%	F 98%
Ethnicity	S 58%, F 39%	F 96%
Language (fluent or good)	S 80% F 64% M 24%	F 90% S 20% M 22%

Percentage relations of the population groups in Harapanda and Tornio (after Zalamans 2002).

S – Swedish, F – Finnish, M – Meankieli

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